DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 181 460 CS 205 352

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TITLE Manzo's Language Shaping Paradigm (LSP).
PUB DATE [77]
NOTE 11p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Composition (Literary); Language Arts; *Peer Evaluation; Postsecondary Education; Secondary Education; *Student Writing Models; Teaching Methods; *Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

A teaching strategy has been devised to teach students how to value their own thoughts and experiences. Secondary purposes of the strategy are to help students deal with their own identities, to improve their general language and essay writing abilities, and to heighten their appreciation of the writing of others. The seven steps of the teaching method are: (1) begin with a provocative discussion from which a purpose for writing is generated; (2) record the student's essay or have the student write it; (3) select one or two essays to edit jointly with the student, being sure the student understands the class will be the audience; (4) prepare comprehension questions on the student-written essay at literal, interpretive, and applied levels; (5) prepare two or three language usage exercises to point out the weaknesses and merits of the student's style; (6) have the class read the essay, do the comprehension check, and discuss their answers with the student/author; and (7) have the class complete the language exercises. (A sample student theme and teacher-written comprehension questions are included). (AEA)

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Manzo's Language Shaping Paradigm (LSP)*

Purpose: The primary purpose of the LSP is to teach students how to value and profit from their own thoughts and experiences. The process also helps students to get a firmer grip on their unique identities, to improve their general language and writing abilities, and to heighten their appreciation of the writing of others.

Basic idea: The basic teaching strategy, or paradigm, is built around having students read essays written by class peers. These are treated as important works. The essays are edited, reproduced, and accompanied by comprehension questions and language improvement exercises.

One of the very special benefits in this technique seems to come from the student's realization that his work can take on a more durable quality than a typical theme which even the teacher may not get to read. This is a strong source of motivation to think and language effectively.

Step 1: The LSP should begin with a provactive discussion from which a purpose for expressing (writing) is generated (see: Heuristic Statements and Motivating Reading).

Step 2: Depending on the level of sophistication of the students, the teacher either records the oral story (discourse) of the student, or the student writes it himself as a conventional essay.

Step 3: The teacher selects one or two essays to be edited jointly with the student, being sure the student understands that the next step will involve having the class read his work.

*(Excerpt from draft Manuscript of Manzo, A.V., and Sherk, J.K., University of Missouri - Kansas City, 1977).

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Step 4: The teacher, with the possible help of the student, prepares comprehension questions on the material at a literal, interpretive, and applied level. A full treatment of the narrative.

Step 5: The teacher, more than likely without the author's input, prepares two or three exercises to improve expression and language. These should be designed to point-up both the weaknesses and merits of the author's style. Three basic types of Language Exercies can be constructed easily: a) word/phrase/punctuation improvement; b) improving sentence structures and/or mood; c) re-writing small sections, or re-structuring plot and sequence.

Step 6: The class reads the essay and does the comprehension check. Answers are discussed. The author is present during the discussion, but should maintain a low profile to permit uninhibited interaction among class members.

Step 7: Based on the common frame of reference provided by the comprehension check, the class turns to the Language Exercises. The author may participate more openly in discussing the language exercises.

Comments: In our experience, student-authors have tended to be very objective during discussions, critiquing their work, often joining in the criticism in a self-correcting way. Discussions have tended to be very adult, generally light, and sharply analytical. In all, a good Experience with Languaging Activity.

Example/Sample

The theme shown below was done with an inner city adult in a high school equivalency course. It was stimulated by a discussion about dreams and their interpretation. The instructor worked individually with this student, writing his

story for him as he told it. The other members of the class attempted to write their own stories at their desks.

The instructor and student edited the theme together until it was to the student's liking.

I Dreamed I Was Green

Author: Frank Cody, Age 31
Kansas City, Missouri

I fell asleep last night on the couch in front of my T.V. I was watching an old movie called the "Boy with the Green Hair."

My body ached from another long day. My stomach was now working on the cornbeef and cabbage, Dynamite! The combination made me dream a strange dream. I dreamed that I woke up and had turned green. God, it was so real! At first I thought it was the light. Then I thought someone was playing a practical joke on me. But none of these things made sense. The kids were fast asleep and my wife had not yet come home from her part-time job. She is a ticket girl at the Waldo.

I called the doctor. The answering service wanted to know what was wrong. I told them. He never called back. I went next door to my neighbor, Bud. He was shocked. He brought me to the hospital. His wife watched our kids.

The doctors said there is nothing wrong with you that we can tell, except that you are definitely green!

Now the dream gets all crazy. All I know is that I find myself planted in the backyard and beginning to look more and more like a tree. Then a lot of time passes. And the house is old and my wife and kids are gone, but I'm still in the backyard. No one seems to notice me. I'm not unhappy. I'm not happy. I'm nothing. I'm just there.

Well, that's not really true, about me just being there, I mean. There are moments when I'm very happy, like when squirrels and birds are playing on my branches. And I really feel good when I turn beautiful colors in the fall. And even though I don't like the winter, it's kind of nice to be covered with blue-white snow. February is worst, Dark and sad. But then in March I begin to swell on the inside. I feel life stirring inside me, like a woman does long before anyone even knows she is pregnant. Then April showers and then in May I bust-out of myself and turn beautiful green.

I woke up at about that time. This may sound crazy, but I was a little disappointed that I was not green.

Comprehension Check (Level I)

Directions: Decide whether the following statements are consistent with those made in the story. Circle the T for True or the F for False. You may not look back to the story to answer these questions. Write the number of the line(s) which helped you answer each question.

T F 1. The kids woke me from my dream by the racket that they were making. (line _____)

T F 2. Thank goodness for the help of my neighbor, Fran. (line _____)

T F 3. My neighbor was shocked to see that I was green. (line _____)

T F 4. February is best. I love the blue-white snow. (line _____)

Comprehension Check (Level II)

(Recall) 1. What was the man who wrote this article doing when he fell asleep?

(Recall) 2. What is the first thing this man did when he realized that he had turned green?

(Recognition and Conjecture) 3. Find the line in the story which tells the kind of work the "green man's wife does? What is the name of the place she worked at? What kind of place do you think it is?

(Translation) 4. What is another word for "working" in the sentence below?

"My stomach was now working on the cornbeef and cabbage."

(Conjecture) 5. Why do you suppose the writer of this story dreamed that he was green?

(Evaluation and Explanation) 6. Do you think that you would like to have the man who dreamed he was green as a friend? Why?

(Evaluation and Explanation) 7. Did you like this man's story? What part did you like best or least?

(Evaluation) 8. Does dreaming, in your opinion, serve any useful purpose? Can it be bad for you?

The questions above are arranged in order of increasing difficulty of question type. The higher order questions require deeper thinking and more sophisticated language. This does not mean that a specific question of a recall type, for example, could not be "harder" to answer correctly than a "higher" order question. It simply is not as demanding in terms of integrative thinking and language requirement.

Comprehension Check (Level III)

Consider carefully the statements below. In column A answer yes if you think the writer of the story might believe the statement or no if you think he would not. In column B indicate which line or lines from the story helped you to decide on your answer.

Statements

A yes/no	B Line(s)	
		1. I hate boiled food.
		2. A man needs friends.
		3. Doctors aren't really much good.
		4. I am nothing but a vegetable. I'm just there.
		5. I really don't like kids much.
		6. Nature is refreshing.
		7. Only jerks go out of their way to look different.
		8. Life has its ups and downs.
		9. Dreaming isn't good for you.
		10. I sure wish things wouldn't change as much as they do.

Language Improvement Exercises

Choosing More Appropriate Words (Level I)

Sometimes replacing (or modifying) a few words in a paragraph can greatly improve the clarity of expression. Carefully study the paragraph below. Decide which of the underlined words you would replace from the list of words provided in the left column.

I 1 called the doctor. The answer service 2 wanted to know what was wrong. I told them. 3 He never called back. I went next door to my neighbor, Bud. He was shocked. 4 He 5 brought me to the hospital. His wife 6 watched our kids.

Replacement Words

spoke to
phoned
asked
the doctor
Bud
drove
looked after
told

I 1) _____ the doctor. The answering service 2) _____ what was wrong. I told them. 3) _____ never called back. I went next door to my neighbor, Bud. He was shocked. 4) _____ 5) _____ me to the hospital. His wife 6) _____ our kids.

Improving/Style/Mood (Level II)

"I Dreamed I Was Green" is written in a half-humorist, half-serious way. That is to say, the language is quite casual.

Decide which of the sentences below best matches the mood of "I Dreamed I Was Green." Underline the words, phrases and/or punctuations which seem to contribute or take away from that mood. Write "I" for improved, "N" for not. (Number one is done as an example).

N 1. I called the doctor's answering service to see if I could get his opinion on why I might be green.

_____ 2. I called the doctor. Naturally, I got some corny answering service.

_____ 3. I went next door to my neighbor, Bud. He was shocked.

_____ 4. Bud's wife, Martha, volunteered to look after the children while I was at the hospital.

_____ 5. You guessed it, the doctor never called back.

It is a good idea to work through an example or two of this type of exercise before assigning it for the first time. In the case of the example above, it could be pointed out that the two phrases underlined are too formal and detached for this piece; and therefore, while more "correct," are not better in the sense of improving the mood or impact in this literary case.

Rewriting or Reorganizing (Level III)

Do A or B.

A. Pretend that you are the author of this article and rewrite the paragraph between lines 16 and 20 in a way that you believe would improve it.

_____

_____

B. Reorganizing. Can you see any means by which this piece can be reordered so that the basic story remains the same, but the effect is more imaginative or stylish. (You may rewrite small sections to accomplish this.)